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Foundations of College Writing – Dr. Sherry

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## **Challenging Traditional Education**

### **Problem**

One must go to high school for four years and graduate with good grades to then continue and go to college for four years, all the while taking out loans that he or she plans on paying back... someday. This is generally what everybody thinks, and so generally everybody does this. And this is what everybody should do, right? Well, I might have some information and ideas that could make one think differently. However, according to a statement made by Thomas, Hughes, and Karp (2003), there is a lack of literature on this subject, and I find it remarkable that something so useful and beneficial to students is being drastically overlooked.

This information is what I believe to be the future of education, yet it is rare to come across a student who is aware of the opportunity, and using it to their advantage. What is this valuable piece of information? There is a way to save time, money, and effort when it comes to doing well in high school, and moving on to get a college degree. Dual enrollment is a means to take college classes in high school letting students earn credit for the class both in high school and college. I am going to make my argument as to why I think this method should be provided to all students by using others' data accompanied by my own research and thoughts on what can be deduced from the provided information.

### **Background**

Dual enrollment classes have been around for over thirty years. They allow students to gain college credit before actually entering college (Thomas, Hughes, and Karp 2003). Research done by Bailey Thomas, Katherine Hughes, and Melinda Karp shows that taking these courses can lead to upper echelons of success after high school. After explaining what dual enrollment is, the researchers pose the thought that "since dual enrollment can increase the intensity and rigor of the high school curriculum, challenging students through these programs could lead to high levels of college success." So why aren't more students interested in the possibility of bettering their chance of post preliminary success?

Unfortunately there is not much data concerning dual enrollment classes and their link to success in college for the students who were a part of these courses. However, we can see how taking classes this way can help to ease the transitioning between high school and college. Sometimes simply taking four years of regular high school classes is not enough to prepare one for what lies ahead. A survey of high school graduates and college professors presents some insightful news.<sup>1</sup> "In the 2004-2005 surveys of high school graduates, college instructors, and employers commissioned by Achieve, Inc., 39 percent of college students reported having a gap in

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the skills and abilities expected of them in college, and college instructors estimated that 42 percent of their students were not adequately prepared.”(Cassidy, Keating, and Young n.d.)<sup>2</sup> This means that either the high school classes weren’t challenging or rigorous enough for the students or the students did not take full advantage of the classes offered by the school and or dual enrollment program.<sup>3</sup> While this data is troublesome, I believe it is extremely insightful. Dual enrollment, however, cannot help students who aren’t interested in doing well or succeeding. So in some cases, students may say they were not adequately prepared for college only because they did not put in the work necessary to make the most of their opportunities. On the other hand, I believe that students who really want to work hard and apply themselves to being the best they can be will gain a lot from these courses when it comes to being ready to bridge the gap between high school and college. Taking the classes will allow them to be on campus (in most cases) and have to start being responsible for themselves for the first time (Cassidy, Keating, and Young n.d.). This responsibility is still comfortable at a younger age because even though they are on campus, they still go home every day, and have the same support system they have while going through high school. Therefore, it is a great way for them to ease into really being on their own. While this seems to be the best solution for high school to college transitions, it requires professor and peer support.

Everything about dual enrollment seems pretty great, right? I would say so – students get to take college classes at incredibly reduced rates (sometimes even free), all while they’re gaining real life experience, along with college credits to put toward their degree program (so they don’t have to take as many dreaded general education courses). They are also saving time, because they have those courses out of the way by the time they enter college full time, and they are getting valuable tools to aid them in their transition to college life that they otherwise might not get.

However, some critics are opposed to dual enrollment. Some state officials and legislators are not always on board with this different approach to education, but it is usually because of financial issues. In other cases though, people may think that the company of high school students in a college classroom would compromise the intended rigor of the course (Thomas, Hughes, and Karp 2003).

So what are the real benefits of challenging the traditional ways of schooling? And what are the downfalls? Is it the right thing to do for every student, or does it depend on his or her individual needs? Should it be enforced by schools? Or should this option simply be made more available to students? These are the questions I will venture to answer.

## **Method**

I was able to interview a few students, some still in high school and some graduated, about their thoughts on dual enrollment. In doing this, I was hoping to find out about real life situations of people and their experiences or lack of experiences with the program. I found that overall, people thought highly of dual enrollment after hearing its pros and cons. I asked them questions about what they knew about dual enrollment, and if they planned on, or were taking classes through the program. The reason

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I asked whether or not they knew about it, was because I had the feeling that dual enrollment is under promoted, and I wanted to confirm or deny that thought. I thought it would be a good idea to interview students not yet in high school, students in high school, and students that graduated from high school. Although I was not able to ask as many people as I would need for it to perfectly and accurately represent all students, I feel as if I got enough of a variety to make the claims I do.

## **Findings**

The first student I talked to was in middle school. I asked him if he planned on going to college, and he said he was planning on it. Then I asked him if he knew about dual enrollment programs, and the possibility of taking classes in high school that count for college credit. He responded, "I don't really know what it is or what it means, but I do know you can take college classes in high school." When asked if he plans on taking these classes he said he does. To me this means that he is starting to think about getting ahead in college, even if doesn't know every detail about it. And that's okay because he doesn't need to yet. As long as these younger students are starting to think about what is in store for them, I believe they are on the path to success, if they continue to work hard and take advantage of these great opportunities.

In another case, I asked these questions to a student who is a little bit older, a sophomore in high school. He stated that he knew about taking college classes while in high school because he had heard of students who were currently doing just that. He also plans on taking the courses. When I questioned what his reasons for taking the courses are he said, "I want to get a feel for college classes in high school before I actually go and you can get credits." In other words, he is planning on dual enrollment classes giving him some experience with college to help in easing his transition. Along with that, he wants to be able to obtain credits for college so he can get ahead in his studies there. As earlier mentioned, he is aware of the dual enrollment program because of other people he has heard of who are currently enrolled.

The next two students I interviewed are both high school graduates. The first student is planning on taking a few individual classes at college, related to what she is interested in, but she is not taking a full degree program. She does wish she would've taken these dual enrollment options, but she was not really aware of the possibility and did not have somebody to show her what to do. Although she wishes she would have taken these classes I am not sure how much help to her they would have been, since she does not plan on working toward a full degree. Even though I say that, education is never a waste, and it is possible that if she had taken college classes in high school, she may have developed an interest in something she never knew she would enjoy. Thus, she could have continued to pursue that newfound interest as a career. In all that, I am trying to say that these classes are not only good for students who know that they want to go to college for a full major program after graduating. This is an example of a student who doesn't have huge academic goals for post preliminary schooling, but still wishes she would have taken the college credit classes. Why is this? I believe that it is because it would be beneficial to have this experience for potential future jobs and even before that, job interviews. Students who were able to complete college level learning in high school will present a good image to their future employers as somebody who is a hard worker and has self-discipline.

The other high school graduate has also completed college, so I thought he would be a perfect person to ask about dual enrollment. He said he did not take college credits in high school, even though he knew about the program, he wasn't sure if his school offered it. When I asked him why he didn't look into it more and pursue taking the classes, he responded, "Because my major wouldn't really benefit from that. If I would've went to college for something that normal colleges offer then I would've wanted to look into it." He went to an aviation school, and even though he said dual enrollment wouldn't have benefitted him, I disagree. I went on to ask if he had to take general education classes.<sup>4</sup> His response was a simple "Yes."<sup>5</sup> He didn't seem to understand that if he had taken some of those courses while in high school, he would have likely paid less and saved time. This puzzled me because even though he thought it wouldn't have benefited him, it would have, and even after graduating college he never realized it. To me this means that high schools aren't doing a good enough job really explaining dual enrollment and showing students the benefits of it.<sup>6</sup> Even if the student is in a very specific major, taking classes in high school helps to save time and money by getting those general classes out of the way.

## Conclusion

Through my research, I am unable to conclude if dual enrollment would really help these students, since they have not participated in this type of program. For those who do plan on taking the classes, I am excited to see how it goes for them when they are able to start taking college credits. For those who missed their opportunity, I wish they would have been able to take part in this great program that presents so many amazing opportunities. Since every student is incredibly different from others, there is really no absolute way to tell how much of a difference dual enrollment classes make in their lives. However, we can see from the research laid out in my background section that the classes aid in obtaining many life skills students will need going forward.

Unfortunately, I think that sometimes other students get discouraged or don't even think about the opportunity of dual enrollment because they don't think they are "as smart" as the kids taking it who they hear about. This is a cultural misconception. As more and more research is done, I am more and more convinced that intelligence has very little to do with genetics, and intelligence is not at a fixed state. Carol Dweck talks about the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset in her book *Mindset*. Students with this fixed mindset believe that they cannot do anything about their level of intelligence, and as a result have no motivation to work to do well in their studies, since they believe they are stuck with how they are. In contrast, those with the growth mindset consider themselves as being able to learn more all the time, and therefore work at whatever they do to be even better than what they were previously. "With the fear of failure looming, students with the growth mindset instead mobilized their resources for learning." (Carol Dweck 2006)

I feel that my research confirmed my thoughts that schools could be doing more to promote these dual enrollment options to all students. I would suggest that teachers be taught about the programs, so they can talk to students that they think would have an interest in them or that would greatly benefit from them. If students know about these classes, it is their responsibility to take action and start working to get ahead for the future. However, if they are never properly taught about the

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prospect of these college classes, they don't even have the choice, and their future as students and professionals could be less successful than if they would have been given a chance.

Researchers Bailey, Hughes, and Karp (2003) wrote that taking these classes could lead to higher levels of success. Although I was unable to interview anybody who did take dual enrollment classes and is now in college, I would have to agree with this statement. Taking these classes will save money by paying a reduced rate for tuition, it will save time because one only has to take the class once since it counts for both high school and college credit, all the while helping a student grow more accustomed to being on their own and having to be responsible for themselves. With that being said, I believe that dual enrollment should be better promoted in schools, so that students are clearly aware of the opportunity available to them.

I make the claim that as more research becomes available about this topic, more schools, universities, teachers, students, and parents will begin to look at the option of taking dual enrollment as an infinitely more beneficial alternative to the traditional education model. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if in our lifetimes, dual enrollment will be the new model for education. These new methods of schooling might seem too challenging or intimidating for students still in high school wanting to take a bold step in their education. But if faculty, peers, and parents are on board with the programs, and are willing to help and support them, these students who are going the extra mile will be on their way to making a positive difference in themselves, their communities, and eventually, the world.

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